

1 Corinthians 16:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

All the brethren greet you. Greet ye one another with an holy kiss.

Analysis

All the brethren greet you—This corporate greeting, broader than the Asian churches (v. 19), likely includes Paul's ministry team in Ephesus and perhaps converts from across his mission field. The repetition of greetings emphasizes relational connectivity across the early Christian network.

Greet ye one another with an holy kiss—*Philēma hagion* (φίλημα ἅγιον, "holy kiss") appears five times in the New Testament (Romans 16:16, 1 Corinthians 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:12, 1 Thessalonians 5:26, 1 Peter 5:14). The kiss was a standard Mediterranean greeting between family and friends; Paul sanctifies it as *hagion* (ἅγιον, "holy"), set apart for Christian fellowship. This physical expression of unity and affection countered Corinthian factionalism. The church is family, not merely an organization, and physical affection expresses spiritual reality.

Historical Context

The kiss greeting, common in Mediterranean culture, was adopted by Christians as a liturgical practice in worship services. Early church fathers (Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria) describe the holy kiss as part of Christian worship. By the medieval period it evolved into the "kiss of peace" still practiced in some liturgical traditions. The kiss demonstrated reconciliation and equality, shocking in a stratified society.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. Why does Paul repeatedly command Christians to greet with a holy kiss—what theological or pastoral purpose does it serve?
2. How do physical expressions of affection (handshake, embrace, kiss) incarnate spiritual realities of Christian unity?
3. What contemporary practices serve the same function as the holy kiss in expressing reconciliation and fellowship?

Interlinear Text

Ἄσπάσασθε ὑμᾶς οἱ ἀδελφοὶ πάντες Ἄσπάσασθε

Greet ye

G782

you

G5209

G3588

the brethren

G80

All

G3956

Greet ye

G782

ἀλλήλους ἐν φιλήματι ἀγίω

one another

G240

with

G1722

kiss

G5370

an holy

G40

Additional Cross-References

Romans 16:16 (Holy): Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you.

1 Thessalonians 5:26 (Holy): Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss.

1 Peter 5:14 (Parallel theme): Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity. Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus. Amen.

